



& Workers' Liberty **Solidarity**

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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Two nations, two states

Recognise Israel's right to exist

Peace and workers' unity across the borders

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Far right grows in Brazil's impasse

By Colin Foster

On 8 April Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, president of Brazil from 2003 to 2011 and until recently the leader in opinion polls for Brazil's next presidential election in October this year, surrendered to police to begin a 12-year jail sentence for corruption.

Brazilian politics has been swamped for the last four years by corruption scandals. They got Lula's successor as president, Dilma Rousseff, removed from office in May 2016.

Since Lula is already 72 years old, this jail sentence may take him out of politics for good. Under Brazilian law he is now disbarred from the presidential election.

That there was corruption while Lula and the Workers' Party (PT) were in office, from 2003 to 2016, is not doubted. Its purpose was not, or not mainly, to enrich Workers'

Party leaders, but to keep shaky political allies on board (the PT has never had a majority in Parliament) and to conciliate key capitalist interests.

Now, however, corruption investigations have become a cutting-edge for right-wing forces, with politicians of the left like Rousseff and Lula targeted much more swiftly than probably-more-culpable right-wingers. Brazilian left-wingers have called the process a "parliamentary coup".

For a few days before 8 April, Lula refused to hand himself in, and took shelter in the metal workers' union office in a working-class suburb of Sao Paulo where he started out as a union activist in the 1970s, a founder of the PT in 1980, and a founder of the CUT trade-union confederation in 1983.

Demonstrators crammed the streets outside the office. PSOL, a 2004 split-off from the PT which is

now Brazil's largest party to the left of the PT, said that the judges' "decision is part of the sinister plot that seeks to cripple Lula's candidacy and silence voices denouncing the parliamentary coup that has imposed dozens of setbacks on the Brazilian people. We express our solidarity with Lula and his family, the Workers' Party and all the voters of the former president".

The PT in its early years was a combative revolutionary socialist party, based in the working class, and with a democratic internal life, though never with a sharp and precise program.

Over the years, as it approached electoral success, and as important parts of its working-class base were weakened by the decline of some industries, it tamed and bureaucratized itself. In office after 2003, it attempted no more than redistribution of the proceeds of some export successes which Brazil

was able to score in those years.

The redistribution included important reforms, but never challenged neoliberal frameworks. Faced with economic crisis after retaining office in the 2014 presidential election, Lula's successor Rousseff turned to cuts.

The PT's base had been too far tamed and demobilised to resist effectively when the right wing, seeking revenge, came after Rousseff and Lula.

The caretaker right-wing administration of Michael Temer, in office since May 2016, is unpopular. Brazil's economy has recovered slightly from its crash in 2015-6, but showed only 1% growth between 2016 and 2017, and has unemployment at 12.6% and still not falling.

The polls for the presidential election in October now show political impasse. The maverick far-right politician Jair Bolsonaro, a former military officer who openly



praises Brazil's military dictatorship of 1964-85, leads, but with only 20% of the vote. Only one other candidate, Marina Silva, a former PT member but now a maverick centrist who backed the right-wing candidate in the 2014 presidential run-off, has more than 10%.

The PT's fallback candidate has just 2%. Around 40% of the electorate refuse to make a choice.

Caesar marches on in Hungary

By John Cunningham

On Sunday 8 April, Viktor Orbán's FIDESZ party (Hungarian Civic Alliance) and his partners, the Christian Democratic Party, won 134 seats out of the 199 in the Hungarian Parliament.

This is Orbán's third victory. He has the two-thirds majority he needs to run roughshod over the Constitution.

The campaign was in effect run on a single issue – immigration, although Hungary has the third lowest level of immigration in the whole of the EU. Xenophobic rhetoric of the worst kind spewed out from the Orbán camp. If you believed him, Hungary was about to be overrun by Jihadists, terrorists, suicide bombers and a tide of Muslim refugees. Just as nasty were Orbán's thinly veiled anti-semitic attacks on George Soros, the Hungarian born financier. The very same man who, in its early days,

helped to finance FIDESZ!

There is a song "Things can only get better", said to be a favourite of the Blairites. I don't know if there is a song entitled "Things can only get worse", but this could be the anthem for Hungary in the wake of this election.

Hungary looks set to continue its backward trajectory to the Christian Nationalism of the 1930s — what the historian Emilio Gentile calls "political religion" where a rigid and traditional social order is maintained by an oligarchy whose elite is hand-picked by a "Caesar" (i.e. Orbán). Paternalism when it works, repression when necessary and a mystical, nationalistic elevation of the "Magyar spirit" to the exclusion of non-Magyars, refugees and Jews.

Orbán, like most Caesars, doesn't like to get his hands dirty and will leave most of the "heavy duty" Jew-baiting to the far right supporters of the neo-Nazi Jobbik party. Jobbik is second in the poll with

19.2% of the vote.

Of course, no election is ever won in a vacuum. For FIDESZ to have won such a thumping majority also requires an opposition that is weak and ineffective.

The Hungarian opposition parties could not agree on even a minimal programme with which to oppose FIDESZ. In the previous election in 2014 there was an electoral alliance — Unity — which won 38 seats, not much to shout about but at least it gave opponents of FIDESZ a focus. Since 2014 Unity has basically collapsed.

In Sunday's election the opposition's results were poor. The Socialist Party came third with just 12% of the vote and its leading figure has resigned. The other opposition parties: DK (Democratic Coalition), LMP ("Green Liberals") and Együtt (Together) have so far managed a total of 18 seats between them.

The opposition's lack of political will, their lack of understanding of what was needed in this election,



their failure to co-operate at any level, is the hallmark of utter political bankruptcy. A left-oriented coalition, based on a minimal programme of democratic reform and opposition to FIDESZ, seems the only forward.

This programme would need to

include: freedom of the media; an end to cronyism; academic freedom, freedom of movement and absolute opposition to anti-semitism.

Building this coalition must start now before Caesar turns into Napoleon.

Danger in US-China tit-for-tat

By Martin Thomas

As I write on 10 April, US stock markets are recovering after dipping in the wake of tit-for-tat tariff announcements by US president Donald Trump and by the Chinese government on 4-5 April.

Trump and then the Chinese authorities have announced new 25% tariffs on a range of imports from each other. Those are bigger than and additional to the new tariffs in-

troduced by Trump in March on steel and aluminium, and the Chinese retaliations for them.

With China running a more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger, responsible-adult pose, majority plutocrat opinion is now hoping that the announcements are largely negotiating ploys, to be modified before implementation.

Otherwise, important sectors of US capitalism are worried that the new tariffs, supposed to improve their competitive position, will in fact worsen it by depriving them of

low-cost Chinese components for their products.

Trump has given no deadline yet for bringing his new tariffs into force, and China says it will wait to see what Trump does.

The risks of a slide towards trade war remain. The slide will probably be moderate for now, but vulnerable to escalating out of control when a new 2008-type crash comes round.

Trump has swung his administration team to the maverick populist right, with only Defence

Secretary James Mattis remaining of the former "responsible adults".

He, or his advisers, seem genuinely to think that the relative decline of some sections of US industry is due to low tariffs and that the clock can be run backwards by raising trade barriers. As Lawrence Summers, a top economic official for Clinton and Obama, points out (Financial Times, 9 April), that view is delusory.

"The US economy was largely open [in tariff terms] by the 1980s

and... every major trade agreement has reduced other nations' trade barriers by far more than it altered any American trade barriers.

"The real reason for economic disruption was not trade agreements but the emergence of emerging markets as major participants in the global economy".

The world may be pushed into beggar-your-neighbour-ism by Trump chasing an impossible and demagogic aim of restoring imagined "good old days".

Workers and students against Macron

By Olivier Delbeke

French President Emmanuel Macron has undertaken a whole raft of counter-reforms, which is slowly but surely creating a rising wave of mobilisation.

Centralising and generalising these mobilisations is not only a trade union question but also a political question.

Let's look at these reforms and their reactions.

1. Increasing CSG social security contributions levied on old age pensions as of 1 January 2018.

On 1 January this year, Macron increased the CSG charge applied to pensions by 1.7 %. Mainly hitting small and medium pensions, this measure saw a united response from all the pensioners' trade union organisations (except the CFDT trade union federation, which is in favour of the CSG in principle, and supports Macron). This led to the big demonstrations of pensioners on 15 March.

2. The movement of workers in [sheltered accommodation system] EPHAD broke out into an unprecedented wave of strikes and demonstrations on 15 March.

Budget cuts are turning these hospices into sinister places of death where there is no longer any guarantee of care or minimum respect for patients.

Several strong strikes with workplace occupations, supported by patients' families who are well aware of their parents' plight, have given rise to demonstrations by workers who are new to the movement.

3. Attacks on public services: in early March, the government opened "negotiations" with the public sector trade union federations by sending an incendiary message which proposed four big attacks on public service terms and conditions:

a) the fusion of CTs (Technical Committees, elected at the level of Ministries and local services to discuss organisation of work and services) with CHSCTs (Health and Safety and Work Conditions Com-



mittees), with the aim of greatly reducing trade union representation among state employees, and cutting the money spent on facility time for trade union reps attending those meetings.

b) undermining in-house public servant employment status, to promote the recruitment of contractors who don't have the same legal employment rights, or job protections.

c) introducing performance-based pay with a system of individualised bonuses, undercutting general wage increases.

d) voluntary redundancies as a means of hitting the target of cutting 120,000 public servant jobs.

4) The attack on the SNCF and the railway workers: the government wants to undertake a "great reform" of the SNCF state railway company on a pretext of paving the way for competition on the rails. The project aims to undermine railworkers' "special regime" employment conditions, which allow them to retire at 51 or 55 and other advantages including free tickets for railworkers and their families. It also aims to close some branch lines.

5) The movement of students against the ORE law. The Education Minister wants to limit access to universities for students who have passed the baccalaureate exam. Currently any student who has passed their "bac" can sign up to the university course of their choice.

Using the Parcourssup system, a pernicious form of selection has been brought in, which relies on a rather dubious evaluation of the abilities and preferences of lycée students who want to apply to uni-

versity.

6) The movement against school class cuts in rural areas.

In rural areas, the government is giving primary school classes the chop. Local campaigns have mounted occupations of schools by hundreds of parents, in areas unused to big movements.

Everywhere, the logic is the same: civilisation, public service, and rights for all, against market society and untrammelled competition.

As with Thatcher and the miners, so with Macron and the SNCF railworkers: it's a race. Will battle be joined on the railways fast enough that the railworkers aren't isolated and weakened? We can see that a deep-rooted movement, starting with some of the least-organised sectors of society is in motion. But the speed with which it spreads depends above all on political conditions.

Since the electoral defeat in 2017, there is no political representation of workers. La France Insoumise, far from being a solution to the problem, is becoming an important part of the problem: Mélenchon's perspective, when you strip away the verbal radicalism and soapbox bombast, is all about respecting the electoral calendar: European elections in 2019, municipal elections in 2020, Presidential election in 2022.

Workers and young people have no time to waste: they need a plan for the struggle based on a desire to beat Macron, here and now, and drive him from office.

• The full version of this article can be found here: <https://bit.ly/2IHZFwR>



Fight the gender pay gap

By Katy Dollar

In news that will surprise almost no one, the country's most comprehensive data collection on pay by gender has shown that men are paid more than women.

The figures show men are paid more than women in 7,795 out of 10,016 companies and public sector organisations in Britain, in terms of median hourly pay.

No sector pays women more. Men are also paid higher bonuses than women.

Though there are cases where women are paid less for the same job, this is not the cause of the gender pay gap. Many low-paid jobs are predominantly done by women, particularly in the caring and service sectors. High paid, professional and managerial jobs are dominated by men. A similar employment pattern explains the less-talked-about race pay gap.

There are immediate measures which would encourage sharing of childcare and reduce the "tax" on women for their greater share of domestic work. Parental leave at full pay should be offered to all parents for at least the first twelve months.

This would encourage a greater sharing of the work of looking after babies and toddlers and normalise breaks in people's working lives, so as not to disproportionately affect women's progression at work. Free universal child care should be extended.

A vastly reduced working week for all workers would free up time for everyone to share the burden and joy of caring for others.

The simplest way to reduce gender (or race) pay inequality is to reduce pay inequality in its entirety. Raising minimum wages and setting maximum wages would of course shrink the gap.

Theresa May has boasted that the national gender pay gap is at a historic low. This is in part due to equality measures but also reflects a trend toward more precarious,

worse-paid work for working class men.

Women on low pay have nothing to gain from equality of poverty and crap jobs. The Labour Party should commit to raise the minimum wage to a real living wage for all workers. We should revisit Corbyn's offhand remark last year that there should be "some kind of high earnings cap" whether linking the legal minimum and maximum wages or through massive taxation on high earners.

TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady said on the gender pay gap:

"Nearly 50 years since the Ford machinists went on strike at Dagenham, the UK still has one of the worst gender pay gaps in Europe. Women effectively work for free for two months a year. Companies publishing information on their gender pay gaps is a small step in the right direction but it's nowhere near enough. Women in the UK will only start to get paid properly when we have better-paid part-time and flexible jobs. And higher wages in key sectors like social care."

"Workplaces that recognise unions are more likely to have family friendly policies and fair pay. So a good first step for women worried about their pay is to join a union."

A good first step for the union movement she heads would be unionisation drives and organisation in low-paid industries. Being in a union is not enough to guarantee higher pay: unions must organise those workers to fight collectively for higher wages.

We have seen brilliant examples of low-paid workers leading fights for higher wages at Picturehouse Cinemas, McDonalds and in universities.

The labour movement must throw its full weight behind these struggles to ensure they win, and look to replicate them across the low-pay economy.

A 16-year-old who rebelled

By Ira Berkovic

Ahed Tamimi, a 17-year-old Palestinian woman, was filmed slapping and kicking Israeli soldiers outside her home in response to their repression of a demonstration in December 2017, when she was 16.

She was arrested and jailed, and has now struck a plea bargain to serve eight months in jail, with a NIS5,000 fine (around £1,000).

According to the Israeli human rights campaign B'Tselem, this is an example of ongoing mistreatment.

B'Tselem says: "The conviction

rate in Israel's military courts in the West Bank is almost 100% — not because the military prosecution is so efficient, but because Palestinian defendants reluctantly sign plea bargains in which they plead guilty."

The campaign has argued that new military courts, such as the Military Juvenile Court, have been established primarily as part of a public relations exercise by Israel, and exist mainly to rubber stamp plea bargains defendants are pressurised into making outside the courtroom:

"Almost all minors sign the plea bargains, having been left little

choice by the military courts-- detention policy: most minors are held in custody from the time of their arrest and until they finish serving their sentence..."

"Even in the extremely unlikely case that they are acquitted, the time they spent in custody throughout the trial may be just as long, or even longer, than the time they will spend in prison under a plea bargain."

As of 28 February 2018, Israeli prisons held 356 Palestinian minors in custody: 95 serving a prison sentence, 257 in pre- or post-indictment detention, with four held in administrative detention.

Gaza: mobilising for an internationalist response

By Martin Thomas

The reckless killing and wounding of Palestinians by Israeli army fire at the Gaza border in recent weeks is likely to be followed by many more clashes.

The organisers of the Palestinian demonstration on the Gaza side of the border fence, and the political-Islamist Hamas, which rules and politically dominates Gaza, plan a series of further demonstrations on Fridays up to the anniversary in mid-May of the declaration of the state of Israel.

The killings were not a new sort of response from the Israeli army. In December, when there were demonstrations on the Gaza side of the border fence over Donald Trump's announcement that he would move the USA's embassy to Jerusalem, Israeli fire killed eight people, including a double-amputee in a wheelchair.

In May, Trump is set to renounce the nuclear deal with Iran, and to carry through the US embassy move to Jerusalem. On 9 April, John Bolton, an open advocate of US war against Iran, took office as Trump's national security adviser. For now aggressively right-wing forces hold the political initiative in Israel.

War dangers are looming. To mobilise broadly for peace — and for a political settlement that can allow peace, namely the establishment of a genuinely independent Palestinian state, in contiguous territory, alongside Israel — is urgent.

In the first place that has to be a mobilisation in support of the opposition inside Israel, and for a demand on the Israeli government, which with a huge superiority of military power holds the shots, that it takes the initiative to end its occupation of the West Bank and its blockade of Gaza, and makes way for "two nations, two states".

Last time there were big mobilisations in Britain over the plight of the Palestinians, at the time of Israel's bombardment of Gaza in 2008-9, they were dominated politically more negatively, by anti-Israel warmongering, than by positive efforts to help Palestinian rights. On the big demonstrations, calls to destroy Israel were made by some platform speakers, and explicitly contradicted by none. On a Sheffield demonstration, Workers' Liberty supporters with placards criticising Hamas as well as the Israeli army had their placards and papers seized and ripped up.

With Zionists flying the Israeli flag recently banned by force from an anti-racist march in Glasgow (17 March), and a sizeable body of opinion in the Labour Party saying that protest against antisemitism is nothing but a contrivance to impede criticism of Israel, it will take effort to get a better outcome.

Hamas and its allies made a choice to stage demonstrations not on the demand that Israel and Egypt end the blockade of Gaza, not

on a call for Israel to concede the Palestinians their right to self-determination in a state alongside Israel, not even on appeals for a halt to Israel's aggressive programme of building new settlements in the West Bank. The choice was to demand "the right of return".

No doubt many Palestinians joined the demonstrations just as the available way to protest against ill-treatment by Israel, rather than choosing that particular demand.

But the organisers chose the demand, one that has no potential to bring a democratic settlement nearer.

The media have reported it flatly, as if it were a regular demand by refugees to get back home, or even a regular demand for freedom of movement across borders.

The conventional story that the liberal mass media are — and, so it is hinted, because of some conspiratorial manipulation — heavily Israel-biased. Denunciation of the "pro-war, pro-US, pro-Zionist BBC" is commonplace.

From that is taken the conclusion that no scale of denunciation of Israel can be excessive, because it is only counterbalancing what is taken to be a great bias the other way in the mass media.

In fact, the liberal media's presentation of the killings has surely and justifiably encouraged pro-Palestinian feeling. In the liberal media's presentation of the background, the lapses and gaps are tilted against Israel rather than for it.

As we have argued for some time now, the "right of return" has over the decades been a demand by Arab states to reverse the outcome of the war of 1948 and collectively repossess what is now Israel as Arab territory again (with varying provisos about some individual and religious, but not national, rights for the Jews living there).

REDRESS

Redress for the Palestinians who live as refugees today is surely a necessary part of a settlement in the Middle East.

It can be achieved by the creation of a genuinely independent Palestinian state, by reparations and aid to that state, by a gradual easing of movement across the borders towards freedom for individuals.

To try to achieve it by the traditional "right of return" is both hopeless — Israel will never agree to a reversal of 1948, and is strong enough to resist — and unjust: it would mean extinguishing the national self-determination of the Israeli Jews.

The choice of "right of return" as the slogan blocks progress — though it is still surely the case that Israel could gazump Hamas politically by conceding and helping to build a genuinely independent Palestinian state in contiguous territory alongside Israel.

"Right of return" is not a demand for elderly Palestinians to be able to live their last



Senior Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh attends the demonstration on 30 March 2018

years in their childhood homes, or for those Palestinians who prefer to live in a mostly-Jewish environment rather than an Arab one to be able to choose that. It is an equivalent of the demand by a minority of German right-wingers in the 1950s and 60s for Germany to reclaim territories like East Prussia, solidly German-majority for centuries, from which Germans were expelled in 1945. The freedom of movement which now exists between Poland and Germany is not a version of that "right of return", but an opposite: the one became possible only because the other had faded from politics.

Often this "right of return" is posed as the good alternative to Israel's "Law of Return", which allows all Jews worldwide to move to Israel. The contrast replaces the political question — how to find a democratic settlement for two nations locked in conflict, one Hebrew, one Palestinian Arab — by an argument about whom patches of land most belong to. Or by the thought that the way to solve the problem is for the Hebrew nation first to become Arab-nationalist rather than Jewish-nationalist.

A democratic settlement which will allow socialists to undercut nationalism can be achieved only by first securing the national rights of both nations.

750,000 Palestinians were driven out or fled from what is now Israel in and around the war of 1948.

In Israel, in 1951, some 220,000 people, about a quarter of the Jews who had arrived there since 1948, also lived in refugee camps. They were mostly Jews who had fled from Arab countries, where a wave of persecution started even before 1948. A Jewish population of 900,000 across the Arab world — with some large concentrations, for example one-third the population of Baghdad — was successively squeezed out, so only a few thousand remain today.

Five million Palestinians, descendants of the people of 1948, are classed by the UNRWA as refugees today, and 1.5 million live in refugee camps.

The reason why they are still classed as refugees, and often have to live as such, while descendants of the Jewish refugees from Arab countries of 1947-67, or the German refugees of 1945, are not and do not, is rooted in Arab states' policies since 1948.

The Arab states made war on Israel but did not help the Palestinians. Jordan and Egypt seized most of the territory allocated by the UN to a Palestinian state — the defeated, dispersed Palestinians were in no position to protest. The Arab states deliberately kept the

refugees — and their children, and their grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren — in refugee camps, with refugee status, blocked (to differing degrees) from integrating where they lived. The Israeli government in 1949 made tentative offers to reintegrate some refugees, but the Arab states were unwilling to negotiate, and many of the refugees, too, believed that the Arab states would surely soon re-run the war with a reversed outcome.

The 1948 war is often presented as if it consisted *only* of the Nakba, the driving-out of Arabs. In fact it came when the Jewish community there, after some years of guerrilla war against the British rulers, and after Britain decided to withdraw and the UN called for Jewish and Palestinian-Arab states side-by-side, declared an independent state and five Arab states invaded, seeking to extinguish that state and (some of their leaders said) "drive the Jews into the sea".

1948

From the usual presentation, you would think that everyone on the left would have backed the Arab armies in 1948.

They did not. The left saw the Jews as people fighting for some security against the age-old persecution which had recently culminated in the Holocaust, and the Arab states as corrupt tyrannies mostly semi-controlled by Britain. Some on the left backed Israel, some thought it impossible to take sides, virtually none backed the Arab states. The demand to re-run the 1948 war with an Arab victory next time was not a demand that people on the left made back then, and has become more, not less, senseless over time.

In 2003 a draft two-states deal, the Geneva Accord, negotiated unofficially but by leading Palestinian and Israeli officials, proposed compensation and limited resettlement for refugee-status Palestinians. It was endorsed by Palestinian leaders but Ariel Sharon's Israeli government rejected it out of hand. Then the idea of mutating "right of return" in that way to gain real redress and make peace seemed to gain headway. Bringing the traditional "right of return" upfront again is a new move.

Isn't it pedantic, or even indecent, to discuss this history when Israel is now strong, aggressive, and so callous about shooting down demonstrators?

It isn't — because a solid movement which can really help Palestinian rights can be built only on the basis of a program which is both realistic and democratic, recognising rights on both sides.

Protests inside Israel

There is an anti-occupation, anti-war movement within Israel, albeit a beleaguered one.

The Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem has launched a campaign calling on soldiers to refuse orders, what they describe as illegal orders, to fire on demonstrators. Hundreds mobilised at short notice to demonstrate outside the ruling Likud party's Tel Aviv headquarters in protest at

the killings in Gaza, with around a hundred attending a joint Palestinian-Jewish "Freedom Seder" in Hebron, in the occupied West Bank.

There have been larger demonstrations in recent years: an estimated 20,000 Israelis demonstrated in May 2017 for an end to the occupation and the establishment of a genuinely independent Palestinian state.

Protest against Israeli shootings

For an independent Palestine alongside Israel

The Israeli army has killed 25 Palestinians, and injured hundreds more, after Israeli Defence Force (IDF) snipers opened fire on two demonstrations on Israel's border with the Palestinian territory of Gaza, on Friday 30 March and Friday 6 April.

One protestor, 18-year-old Abdel Fattah Abdel Nabi, was shot in the back as he turned to flee IDF fire. Another victim was Gazan journalist Yaser Murtaja, killed by a bullet to the abdomen underneath his bullet-proof vest clearly marking him out as a member of the press.

While the bulk of both demonstrations have been peaceful and unarmed, some Palestinians have thrown rocks and molotov cocktails. The 6 April demonstration saw large-scale burning of tires by Palestinian demonstrators. There is no suggestion however that there was any immediate or significant threat to any IDF positions along the border, which had been heavily reinforced in the days and weeks leading up to the demonstration. The IDF has not reported any casualties.

Hamas, the clerical-fascist paramilitary party which rules Gaza, has said five of those killed on 30 March were members of its military wing. Israel claims 10 were.

The fundamental dynamic of the situation is clear: a heavily-armed and sophisticated military power using deadly force against largely peaceful protesters. Anyone who believes in universal human rights and basic freedoms — freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, the right to self-determination — must unreservedly and unconditionally condemn this brutality. The IDF's use of live rounds against demonstrations has become an increasingly common practice.

MARCH

Around 30,000 Palestinians participated in the 30 March protest, with around 20,000 on 6 April.

The demonstrations are "Marches for Return", a planned series of events leading up to 15 May, the day the Palestinians memorialise the "Nakba" (Catastrophe) — the forced expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes by the fledgling state of Israel around the war immediately following its foundation.

The march was conceived by the organisers, at least in significant part, as demanding the full-scale "right of return" — the right of all those Palestinians who were expelled or fled in 1948, and their descendants, to reclaim their land and houses from the Israelis now living there.

Workers' Liberty has opposed the "right of return" slogan, conceived of as a demand to reverse the history of Israel's creation in 1948. We have argued that a two-states settlement, eventually with free movement and open borders between them, are a better means of securing justice for the Palestinians, including the refugees, on a consistently-democratic basis that guarantees rights for both national groups in the region.

Whatever one's attitude to the precise demands of the march, the IDF's murderous response was not justifiable.

In an interview in the Israeli-Palestinian leftist website 972, Hasan al-Kurd, one of the organisers of the march, responded to a question about the possibility of Israeli retaliating to the march with deadly force: "Of course that's a possibility, unfortunately. But what

other options do we have? The situation in Gaza has become unbearable and we absolutely can't live in Gaza any more — that's what prompted us to plan this march and that's why we anticipate so many people to attend the protest."

Al-Kurd said the organisers wanted the demonstration to be peaceful: "We want families. We want to send a message that we want to live in peace — with the Israelis. We're against stone throwing or even burning tires. We will make sure the protest doesn't escalate to violence — at least from our end."

His words now have a particularly tragic resonance. Even if one concludes that the instances of the throwing of stones and molotov cocktails (or even the tire burning) which did take place show that the organisers failed in their aspiration to keep the demonstration peaceful, there is no sense in which the IDF's response is proportionate or justifiable.

Although, according to al-Kurd, only two of the demonstrations' organising committee were Hamas affiliates, its authoritarian political control within Gaza means it cannot but have had a key role in shaping the demonstrations.

CHARTER

Although Hamas revised its charter last year to suggest the possibility of some accommodation with Israel, it also has a new leader, Yahya Sinwar, keen to take action to consolidate his position.

At a protest in Khan Younis on 6 April, Sinwar said the world should "wait for our great move, when we breach the border and pray at al-Aqsa". Sinwar's predecessor as Hamas leader, Ismail Haniyeh, addressed protesters after the 30 March demonstration, saying, "we will not concede a single inch of the land of Palestine and do not recognise the Israeli entity."

Despite the changes to its charter, Haniyeh's statement reflects Hamas's historic programme for the destruction of Israel and the creation of a theocratic Islamic state in the whole of historic Palestine.

Hamas's role does not, of course, justify the brutality of the IDF's response. Even if taken on its own terms, the IDF narrative that the demonstrators were consciously marching for the destruction of Israel and its replacement with an Islamic state, does not justify deadly and manifestly disproportionate actions.

The Israeli military establishment cannot see into the minds and hearts of tens of thousands of Palestinians. Many participants in the marches will surely have been motivated



by a basic desire to protest against the strangulation of Gaza, and for basic rights of freer movement in the here-and-now.

While Israel no longer operates direct military control of Gaza, it has continued a blockade that has strangled economic and social life for its residents.

The Egyptian state also blockades the Rafah crossing; al-Kurd described Egypt as "part of the siege". Israel has repeatedly launched aerial assaults on Gaza; its "Operation Protective Edge" in 2014 is estimated to have killed over 2,000 Palestinians. Its relationship to the Palestinians is that of a colonial power to a colonised people. Racist discrimination against Arabs within Israel's borders is rife.

None of that is answered simply by pointing to Hamas. Hamas is an unquestionably a reactionary force, which frequently exercises its power in Gaza through violent authoritarianism. The rockets launched at Israeli towns near the Gaza border, such as Sderot, by fighters linked to Hamas and other Islamist factions are reactionary attacks designed to hit the civilian population. But Hamas, even with the backing of its regional-imperialist ally Iran, is calculably not in a position to launch the war of invasion and conquest against Israel that figures on the Israeli right tacitly suggest the "March for Return" heralds.

It is the brutalisation of the Palestinians by Israel that has created the conditions in which Hamas's militant Islamic chauvinism can take hold, as what seems to many the best and most immediate defence and response to unbearable conditions of existence. The Israeli state's ongoing refusal to entertain the possibility of direct negotiations with Hamas are an obstacle to peace; its insistence that any expression of self-organisation, or demands for basic rights, by Gazans are merely a cat's paw for the programme of Hamas serves only to aid Hamas in consolidating its power. Indeed, one dynamic behind the demonstrations is an attempt by Hamas to boost its own standing within

Gaza, by appearing to take action against Israel and, in doing so, deflect discontent with its own rule. A September 2017 opinion poll conducted by the Palestine Centre for Policy and Survey Research showed Hamas's support within Gaza standing at just 31%. By its actions, Israel has surely guaranteed that this support will surge.

NETANYAHU

There is also discontent within Israel. The police have recommended the indictment of hard-right Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu for corruption.

Increasingly, Netanyahu appears to be attempting to become an Israeli analogue of both Trump and Putin, running an authoritarian, virulently chauvinist regime. He has recently accused the New Israel Fund, a liberal NGO, of being part of a plot by George Soros, the billionaire Hungarian-Jewish philanthropist. Soros conspiracy theories are a stock-in-trade of the antisemitic far-right. Donations to the New Israel Fund surged after Netanyahu's comments, with over NIS250,000 pouring in.

A strong internationalist movement within Israel itself, challenging its government's colonial and racist policies, is vital for the future freedom and security of Israeli themselves. As Marx put it, when discussing Britain's historic relationship to Ireland, "a nation that oppresses another forges its own chains."

Socialists and internationalists throughout the world must stand in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and against all acts of brutality and violence by the Israeli military. Every Palestinian murdered by the IDF expresses and perpetuates the poison of colonialism.

Only a settlement based on the immediate establishment of a viably independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, and an end to the occupation regime of military checkpoints and border walls, can provide the basis for future peace and closer federation.



Polish women demonstrate against the anti-abortion laws from the Law and Justice Party

Support the Polish socialists!

By Michael Chester

On 23 March — the day that has been dubbed “Black Friday” — tens of thousands of predominantly young activists descended on the centres of Poland’s major cities demanding the far-right Law and Justice government drop its plans for abortion reform.

Abortion law in Poland is already one of the most restrictive in the western world. The only exceptions under which a woman can obtain an abortion are in the case of a threat to the mother’s life, severe foetal abnormality or where conception is as a result of a crime (incest and rape).

The reform proposes to remove the exception in cases of foetal abnormality. This is a retreat from the complete ban defeated by similar mass protests in 2016.

Many women in Poland are forced into illegal abortions; legal abortions are difficult to obtain, due to the number of medical professionals who refuse to carry out the procedure on religiously conscientious grounds.

The protests against the changes, organised primarily through the insurgent left-wing Razem movement, are the latest example of an upsurge of anti-government activism in a country where the right and the far-right have consolidated state power.

The Polish parliament is an exclusively right-wing body. There has been no social-democrat or further left representation since 2015 when the once ruling Democratic Left Alliance lost all their remaining 27 seats in the pre-Pasokification which followed the abortive premiership of third-way social-democrat and former Stalinist civil servant Aleksander Kwasniewski.

Since 2005 power has alternated between the Law and Justice Party and the right-wing, Christian Democratic, Civil Platform.

As with its neighbour Hungary, successive right-wing governments have courted popularity through opportunistic gestures. President Andrzej Duda publicly and defiantly rejected the EU’s migrant quota proposal, eventually “successfully” halving the number of refugees Poland agreed to take.

Additionally, the government pounced on the understandable consternation in the country of the continued use of the term “Polish Death Camps” by lazy historians and journalists to refer to German extermination camps to enact a law which made it punishable by up to three years in prison for any suggestion the Polish nation was complicit in German crimes. A step widely condemned as criminalising free-speech.

Despite these and other nationalist and reactionary policies, the popularity of the

government is at a high, with Duda’s approval rating standing at 72%. Most polls conducted on policy positions such as abortion show a significant anti-choice majority.

The rhetoric and success of these governments has also spurred a revival of extreme-right Polish nationalism and fascism. Attacks on ethnic minorities in Poland and racist demonstration have increased hugely over the past five years.

The labour movement in Poland is a fraction of its former self. In the 1981 it represented the largest independent, democratic trade union membership in history, where 10 million or 90% of all Polish workers represented by Solidarnosc beat Stalinism. Now just over two million are members of national unions or workplace associations and 97% of workplaces have no union. Where unions are “political” they are conservative and in support of many of the governments social policies. Solidarnosc, still a relatively major union federation, notably called off strikes in 2006 in order not to disrupt a Papal visit.

Against this backdrop, the emergent left-wing Razem Party was founded in 2015 by those dissatisfied with the post-Stalinist, Blairite, Social Democrats.

They have been key in organising mass protests of youth against government policy including the fawning state visit of Donald Trump in 2017, and as mentioned have successfully pushed the government to suspend and soften its position on abortion reform.

While Razem are strongest among students and less so among precarious workers, they are gathering limited support among traditional unionised sections of the workforce by being the lone voice in Polish politics demanding workers’ rights and opposition to privatisation as well as for secularism and women’s and LGBT rights.

Poland is a country with an unparalleled history of working-class organisation, strength, and resistance. Razem have the opportunity to provide the necessary political challenge to prevailing right-wing, nationalist attitudes.

Razem also has the opportunity to challenge the existing labour movement from a libertarian socialist perspective that both eschews the rightfully ridiculed and dismissed totalitarian state capitalism and Russian imperialism of the late 20th century and the nationalism, social conservatism and economic liberalism of the last 25 years.

Solidarity urges readers to support this movement which is at the forefront of fighting the barbarism of the far-right. You can find out how at partiarazem.pl

Ireland is a strong

By Mordechai Ryan

The consequences in Ireland of Britain leaving the European Union are among the many strong reasons why Labour should oppose Brexit and demand a second referendum before Britain actually leaves the EU.

For Britain, the consequences of Brexit will be dire as well as being reactionary. For Ireland they may be catastrophic.

Brexit means recreating a full-scale border between the two Irish states, Six Counties and 26 Counties. The independent Irish state will remain in the EU. The Northern state, despite the vote of the majority there to stay in the EU, will leave the EU as part of the UK. A physical barrier and possibly a tariff wall will be re-erected between EU Ireland and Brexit Northern Ireland.

British government talk about somehow avoiding a new “hard” border is probably in large part wish-thinking.

In the quarter-century since the IRA ceasefire, the internal border across Ireland, like all EU internal borders, has come to have less and less meaning.

Its economic meaning had been shrinking since Great Britain and Ireland joined the EU on 1 January 1973. The Provisional IRA war kept it a “hard” military border. After the ceasefire and the Good Friday Agreement the Border dramatically lost function, and intra-Irish politics caught up with the evolution of the rest of the EU.

UK Brexit, a Six Counties majority against it, will re-sharpen old divisions in Northern Ireland, where most Protestant Unionists voted for Brexit, and most Nationalists and others voted against it. Brexit and anti-Brexit raised in renewed sharpness, the relationship between the two Irelands and between Northern Ireland and Britain.

In March 1973, a few months after Britain and Ireland joined the EU, a referendum was held in the Six Counties on unity with the 26 Counties, or with Britain. Nationalists abstained, and the referendum showed a big

majority for union with Britain.

Before World War 1 the Protestant-Unionists had won a veto on a united Ireland. The first year of the Provo war won the abolition of the Belfast parliament (March 1972) and a Catholic-Nationalist veto over Protestant-Unionist majority rule in the Six Counties. From then on, Britain decided, there would be power-sharing government in Belfast, or none.

The EU was peculiarly apt for dealing with, or neutralising, Ireland’s peculiar inter-communal problems. Why?

The Orange Unionist reaction to Gladstone’s First Home Rule Bill, in 1886, made plain what had long been known: that the nationalist goals of a united Ireland and a Home Rule Ireland were incompatible. (A Home Rule Ireland, not an independent one: Home Rule meant something closer to the Greater London Authority now than to independence). A big majority in north-east Ulster (which is not the same as the Six Counties) would make the unity of a Home Rule Ireland impossible.

“Ulster will fight, and Ulster will be right”, became the central Unionist slogan. In dispute between Unionists and Nationalists (and between Unionist-allied Tories and Nationalist-allied Labour) was: what was the proper political unit within which the constitutional status of Ireland, and of Ireland’s relation to Britain, would be decided.

For Irish Unionists and the Tory-Unionist party, it was the UK; for Nationalists and Liberals it was the island of Ireland.

Each camp in Ireland, Unionist or Nationalist, rejected the other’s identity. “British-Irish” or “Irish-Irish” (the term Irish-Irelander was in use then) indicated which identity was more important to each camp, British or Irish. That is how such national-communal conflicts work.

Such a division can be regulated either by a democratic apportionment of rights, in accord as far as possible with the wishes of all those involved, or by conflict. In Ireland both camps looked to British allies to use the British state to coerce the other Ireland — the



reason for Labour to oppose Brexit



Around 100 peace walls now exist in Northern Ireland, more than when the Good Friday agreement was signed in 1998

Nationalists to the Liberals, the Unionists to the Tories.

The Tory Party threatened and prepared for armed rebellion if Home Rule was imposed on the northern Unionist-majority areas.

Tory leader Bonar Law insisted: "There are things stronger than parliamentary majorities". On the very eve of World War 1, they imported guns from Germany. It was the Tories and the Unionists who brought the gun into modern Irish politics.

They succeeded in excluding north-east Ulster from the plans for a Dublin-ruled Home Rule Ireland. War broke out, and the Home Rule question was frozen in Parliament for the duration.

Following the Unionist example, Irish Republicans rose in rebellion at Easter 1916. They were defeated. 15 of the leaders were immediately shot, and one hanged three months later.

In the 1918 General Election a big Irish majority voted for the Irish Republic proclaimed in 1916. For 30 months the Republicans fought a guerrilla war against British occupation forces.

They won Dominion status, a qualified independence, for 26 Counties, enormously more than the Home Rule proposed earlier. A separate Parliament, with its own Home Rule powers, was set up in Belfast to rule a Six Counties state.

The Six Counties was to be a "Protestant state for a Protestant people", as a Unionist leader put it. But the borders were drawn to include in the Six Counties a big swathe of territory, mainly along the border with the 26 Counties, in which the Catholic-Nationalists were a majority. In Derry City, for a crass example, two miles from the inter-Irish border, the Nationalists had a two-to-one majority. (It is now 3-to-1). The Nationalist minority was a larger proportion of the population of the Six Counties than Unionists were in the whole of Ireland.

The Six Counties Catholics were, and were treated as, a conquered hostile people. For 50 years the Six Counties was a Protestant-sectarian state (and in a somewhat different way, the 26 Counties was a Catholic-sectarian state).

The borders of the Six Counties were so drawn that the national minority had no possible constitutional way to change their situation. Here too the political-geographical unit — the Six Counties — predetermined the outcome. The result was that armed rebellion against the state made the only political sense to a lot of serious people.

BREXIT

The fact is that, despite the IRA and its 23-year-long war, British and Irish EU membership from 1973 restored large elements of a reunification of Britain and Ireland by putting both in the common political-economic framework of an emerging European federal state.

A British-Irish Free Trade Agreement in 1965 had already begun to remove the aggressive British-Irish tariffs in place since the 1930s.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 gave the 26 Counties government a big say about what happened in the Six Counties, though Britain kept executive control. In the same year a British-Irish parliamentary committee of MPs and Dail deputies was created. The economic border was vanishing even as the military border loomed very large.

Now, Brexit. And neither the Six nor the 26 Counties are what they used to be.

In the 20th century both Irish states were sectarian, but in different ways. In the North, it was mainly political sectarianism — discrimination against Catholics in jobs and housing, police harassment and bullying, and fiddling electoral borders in local government. The Northern Ireland state as such, subject to the overall laws of Britain, did not discriminate against Catholics as Catholics. Ranting Protestant priests and preachers were prominent, but they did not make the basic law. Segregation in the schools was not imposed by the state, but insisted on by the Catholic Church.

In the South it was religious sectarianism. The bishops dictated the laws — for instance, abolishing divorce in 1925, discriminating against Protestants and Jews, forcing Catholic rules on them, forbidding a rudimentary health service for mothers and infants in the early 1950s, etc.

Bishops could tell ministers of state what to do and not do, and sometimes did not even deign to give reasons. The Church directly controlled the schools. It was a theocracy within a glove-puppet parliamentary democracy. It was the old Unionist nightmare made real — Home Rule was Rome rule, for eight decades.

Tremendous cultural changes have taken place in the 26 Counties in the last couple of decades. An exploding series of sex scandals has massively discredited the Catholic Church: priests raping children in their care, sadistic nuns beating children. Mass unmarked graves of infants and small children have been uncovered where convents once stood. There will be other such discoveries.

The 26 Counties is not the old independent Ireland any more! Nor is the Six Counties what it was.

The IRA ended its war because it had been defeated and knew it could not win. It had won what it finally settled for — an end to Unionist-Protestant rule in the Six Counties, and a British refusal to have any government in Belfast that did not include Catholics — in the first year of the war.

A close relative of what the IRA settled for in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, compulsory power-sharing, was available to them from 1973, in the Sunningdale Agreement. The Good Friday Agreement was only, as a constitutional nationalist put it, "Sunningdale for slow learners".

The IRA ceased fire in August 1994. It attacked military targets in the six counties and set off some bombs in England in 1994-7, but the war was over in 1994-7. In 1998 the Good Friday Agreement was put in place. It institutionalised an intricate system of sectarian checks and balances and thus froze the existing sectarianism.

There are still around 100 "peace walls" and fences, across Northern Ireland but mainly in Belfast, built to separate Catholics and Protestants. The Cupar Way "peace wall" has been up nearly 50 years — much longer than the Berlin Wall. A 2012 report found that "one-third of those barriers for which we have the construction date have been built since the ceasefires" (bit.ly/jarman-pw).

The Belfast power-sharing government collapsed a year ago in a conflict between Sinn Féin and the DUP. Northern Ireland is being ruled from London for the time being.

In Northern Ireland the 2011 census showed 40.8% Catholic, 41.6% Protestant, and 17.7% of other, no, or unstated religion. Belfast now has a Catholic majority.

REFERENDUM

Is it conceivable that a Northern Ireland referendum on a united Ireland within the EU, under the spur of avoiding Brexit, could now produce a majority for some sort of united Ireland? Surely it is.

Although on a straight yes/no question, only 34% in Northern Ireland say they want a united Ireland, opinion polls in late 2017 found 47.9% saying that in the event of hard Brexit, Northern Ireland should remain in the EU by joining a united Ireland, and 45.4% said it should leave the EU by staying in the UK (bit.ly/brexit-ni).

But that would not necessarily change anything. A bare majority of Unionist-Protestants, if that (there was some fiddling of figures), voted for the Good Friday Agreement. There would still be a compact Protestant-Unionist, anti-Irish-unity area against any such changes. That Protestant-Unionist minority would then be trapped as the artificial Northern Ireland Catholic minority were trapped in a constitutional framework, the Six Counties, whose authority they rejected. There would be resistance, though how much is not clear.

Time and again, British politics have intercut destructively with Ireland. To go back no further, the Home Rule crisis of 1912-14 was as bitter and verbally violent as it was because the Liberals had just abolished the Lords' absolute power of veto, making the Commons the ruling body. The Tories wanted revenge, and the Home Rule Bill and the Liberals' dependence on the Irish Home Rule vote in the Commons gave them, they thought, their chance to oust the Liberal government if they could force it to a General Election on Home Rule.

In January 1974 a power-sharing government was set up in Belfast amidst raucous Protestant-Unionist opposition. But there was a majority for it in the Belfast parliament. Then the Tory prime minister in London, Edward Heath, faced with an uncontrollable British strike movement, called an unexpected general election under the slogan: who rules, government or unions?

He lost the election. No fewer than 11 of the then 12 Northern Ireland seats at Westminster were won by the opponents of power-sharing. The authority of the Belfast government was shattered. Two months later an Orange general strike finished it off. It was 24 years before the new power-sharing executive was set up.

British politics is now interacting destructively with Ireland again. I repeat: Ireland is a very strong reason why Labour should campaign to stop Brexit.

Learning from the mural row

By Matt Cooper

In the recent furore about antisemitism on the left triggered by the uncovering of Jeremy Corbyn's 2012 defence of Kalen Ockerman's mural Freedom for Humanity, much of the coverage found it unnecessary to explain the nature of the mural's antisemitism.

But explained it should be, if we want to learn from the episode rather than just use it as a factional gambit. First, there is the Eye of Providence which is depicted on the dollar bill, but is a common piece of antisemitic iconography (see below).

Then, the depiction of the bankers and capitalists. Most clearly, the banker on the left (apparently a representation of Nathan Rothschild) has a hooked nose, Fagin-esque beard and oversized hands moving towards the antisemitic caricature's talons.

The artist is Kalen Ockerman, also known as Mear One. His style combines elements drawn from utopian/dystopian science fiction graphics, a dose of Stalinist socialist realism (lots of well-toned heroic workers staring resolutely into the middle distance), a large pinch of symbolism that could come anywhere from Dutch golden-age still life to Dali, and more than a little Buddhism and general mystical mumbo-jumbo. To judge for yourself, see www.mearone.com.

Ockerman's craft is public art and the communication of political messages: he should be sensitive of the different ways in which the images he uses will be interpreted. He is either an idiot or has deliberately inserted an antisemitic trope into his mural (or both).

These are not images of the type in the Nazi sheet *Der Stürmer*. Those were grosser, showing Jews as inhuman grotesques often identified with a Star of David to guide the not-so-bright reader. Such images have found continued currency in Stalinist antisemitic cartoons and in contemporary Middle Eastern anti-Israeli and antisemitic imagery, and echoes in leftwing caricature in Europe and US.

The Eye of Providence was not originally an antisemitic symbol. It depicts the all-seeing eye of God in the triangle of the Holy Trinity. It was adapted for the Great Seal of the United States with the thirteen tiers of the unfinished pyramid symbolising the founding states, and it is on the dollar bill.

It is a pictorial form of "One Nation Under God". Thus, it could be argued that this is just a symbol of monetary, particularly American, power.

It has to be remembered that Ockerman's



From an antisemitic conspiracy website



Nathan Rothschild caricature on the left, and real man, on the right.

business is communication through images. Anyone who has spent more than a minute or two looking at conspiracy theories on the internet will know that the image is used in antisemitic conspiracy theories, and particularly in association with Jewish bankers, and even more specifically the Rothschilds.

If you simply do use search engine to do an image search with "Jacob Rothschild" (the most recent scion of the banking family) you don't have to scroll far before the Eye pops up. A little more searching on the internet will throw up any number of antisemitic rants accompanied by people branded with a Star of David with the Eye at its centre. In this context the New World Order (also highlighted on the mural) means the one that this Jewish conspiracy seeks to implement.

DAVID ICKE

Since the Corbyn story broke, Ockerman has defended himself (bizarrely, choosing to do so exclusively on the website of right-wing conspiracy theorist David Icke, but more on that later), and has defenders elsewhere on the internet, including on pro-Corbyn Facebook pages.

The gist of these defences are that there are no caricatures (which is simply untrue); not all the bankers or capitalists are Jewish (not the point); and that the Eye of Providence is not indicative of a Jewish banking conspiracy



Nazi antisemitic spider cartoon from *Der Stürmer*, 1934 (top left). A Stalinist antisemitic spider from *Sovjetskaia Moldavia*, 1971 (top right). A contemporary spider cartoon for the Fars news agency of Iran (bottom right)

(in fact, it is widely used to indicate that).

If I were a cynic, I would suggest that Ockerman has put just enough antisemitism in the mural to keep it deniable. But that gives him too much credit.

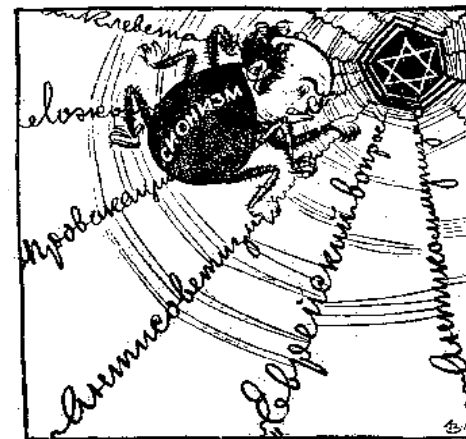
In his defence on David Icke's site he suggests that there is no antisemitic connection to the Eye of Providence, and then suggests that there is a Star of David on the eagle motif on the other side of the US Great Seal.

He then recounts how some Jewish people questioned his imagery while he was painting. He brushes that aside by saying that there are only two Jewish bankers in the group and it includes the Satanist Aleister Crowley.

The sketch that Ockerman was working from (available at bit.ly/ock-sk) suggests his account is untrue. It includes the names of the bankers or capitalists. None is Crowley. It would appear that he was intending to paint the industrialist Andrew Carnegie, but executed it so poorly that he claimed it is Crowley.

It appears that the second banker from the left in the sketch is wearing a kippah, and the name on the sketch is not the non-Jewish Rockefeller whom Ockerman later claimed was represented there.

Ockerman has made great play of the third banker from the left being the non-Jewish J P Morgan (who did possess a large nose in later life, related to his conspicuous consumption of food and drink). But Morgan was fat, and while his hair thinned towards the end of his life, he was never bald.



The mural image looks much more like the Jewish banker Felix Warburg (or possibly one of his equally luxuriantly moustachioed brothers, Paul or Max), and not at all like a depiction by Ockerman of Morgan in a work prior to 2012.

Ockerman's defenders say that none of this is proof. But this is not the first time that Ockerman has defended his mural. He previously did so using less careful language in a 2016 Facebook post (bit.ly/ock-16).

Although the mural has nothing to do with Israel, he states that "I was labelled Anti Semitic by the Zionist and unconscious supporters of capitalism".

He goes on to praise David Icke as "one of a select few who are willing to take a stand against the crimes of humanity committed by the Zionist elite governing the state of Israel and the U.S."

Ockerman links both to the oppression of Palestinians by Israel and to this international elite of "pure evil... unbridled pursuit of money and power." There follows a link to a video by Icke where he argues the world is dominated by "Rothschild Zionists", a secret conspiracy of Jews and crypto-Jews.

This puts the Eye of Providence and caricatured Jewish bankers into their antisemitic context.

Ockerman should not simply be considered someone who has lost his soul to conspiracy theories on the internet. He has developed his ideas in an environment where genuine concern with the plight of the Palestinians can merged into an unfocused anti-capitalism and ideas of the power of the Jewish/Zionist lobby, and so has already moved half way to antisemitic conspiracy theories. The old antisemitic trope of hidden power is recycled as "Zionist" power.

The left antisemitism that was once called the socialism of fools saw the Jewish capitalists as particularly worthy of attention. It is now being updated with the word "Zionist" in place of "Jewish".

Until the left seeks to understand Israel without the demonising bogeys of absolute anti-Zionism, such left antisemitism as Ockerman's will erupt again and again.



The image Ockerman claims depicts J P Morgan (left); J P Morgan (centre); Felix Warburg (right)

The working-class suffragists of 1900

Part three of Jill Mountford's series on the history of the struggle for women's suffrage. Part one of this series was published in *Solidarity* 462 (bit.ly/2FxpR3) and part two in *Solidarity* 463 (bit.ly/2qiyvPA). Parts four and five will appear in future issues.

The story of women's suffrage is conventionally divided into the militant suffrage campaign led by the WSPU and the constitutional one led by the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS).

Not until research done during the second wave of feminism, the women's movement of the 1970s, was a third strand added to the story — the radical suffragists.

Jill Liddington and Jill Norris documented the role of working-class women in the Lancashire and Cheshire mill towns and found they could not comfortably fit these women into either the militant or the constitutional strand. They shared "considerable industrial experience and political radicalism which set them apart..."

This article deals with that working-class women's movement of the early 1900s, which involved many tens of thousands of women at its peak. It helped break the yoke of Victorian norms and expectations for women of all classes.

It shocked and angered Edwardian sensibilities and morals, and has yet to be surpassed in scale, bravery, creativity, and exhilarating inspiration.

Lazy popular history paints us a picture of a London-based women's suffrage campaign, led and made up by middle-class "ladies" and women with titles, and dominated at the pinnacle by the self-appointed aristocrats of

the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), the Pankhursts, Emmeline and Christabel.

The storyteller will, often as not, throw in a young woman with little formal education, dishevelled hair, a shawl and clogs, who speaks with an accent from somewhere up north, but overall, working-class women are hidden, dismissed and ignored in the story of the battle for votes for women.

By examining the bigger picture and stepping outside of London, we can find so much more to appreciate, to be inspired by and to understand about this first wave of feminism and the role socialist and working-class women played in it.

There are many stories to be told about where and how working-class women took up the fight: the Lancashire and Cheshire cotton and silk mill women, the women in the wool mills of West Riding. There are, most likely, stories still to be developed and even uncovered about working-class women's role in the fight for women's suffrage in Scotland.

The best known story about working-class women fighting for their right to vote is that of the East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS) founded and led by Sylvia Pankhurst

But that is only part of the big picture. still lacks detail of many of the working-class women involved. A decade before the WSPU was founded, and almost twenty years before the ELFS was set up, working-class women in the north of England were involved in the fight for the right to vote.

With all the burdens and barriers of long hours of work for low pay; periods of grinding poverty and unemployment; domestic drudgery; all too frequent pregnancies and endless child rearing; low or no formal education; and often of marriage to men who

held backward ideas about women's rights and equality, these women still cared about and found the time and energy to campaign for women's suffrage.

This story begins two hundred miles away from Lancashire and a million miles away from the lives of the working-class mill women. In 1894 a small gathering of middle-class, well educated, constitutional suffrage campaigners, including Isabella Ford and Millicent Fawcett, met in Westminster to discuss and organise a "Special Appeal", with the intention of dispelling the idea that "women do not care about suffrage". For the first time they decided they should "appeal to women of all classes".

In Manchester, a young woman called Esther Roper had just started as secretary for the Manchester Suffrage Society (a post held by Lydia Becker until her death in 1890). Esther was 25 years old, a first generation middle-class woman who had recently graduated from Owens College (forerunner of Manchester University).

She had won a scholarship as part of a trial in research to assess whether university education was bad for women's physical and mental health, and Esther's very unconventional life post-university must have cast doubt for some on the conventional case for higher education for women.

APPEAL

Immediately she got news of the Special Appeal she set herself the task "to bring the Special Appeal under the notice of the factory women of Lancashire and Cheshire".

Women in the textile industries in Lancashire, Cheshire and Yorkshire outnumbered men by 94,000 (311,000 women to 217,000 men). There were more than 96,820 of them in the textile unions compared to only 69,699 men, but mostly they were "represented" by men. Unionised women in the mills made up 83% of all organised women workers in Britain in 1896. At the TUC annual conference in 1900 there were only two women delegates, and neither was from the textile unions.

Esther instinctively knew these were women who cared about their own political representation. She believed they could be rallied to fight for women's suffrage. Though her father had become a respectable Minister for the Church of England, his three sisters, Esther's aunts, had all worked as weavers in the cotton mills in Manchester.

Esther considered Lancashire the "natural home for a women's movement". She was a quiet and studious young woman, but showed both impressive organising skills and wise political judgement. To achieve her goal she linked up with two working-class women, Mrs Winbolt and Annie Heaton, both mill workers with organising and oratory skills. They went on the knock, visiting women at home, leaving them suffrage literature to read, and leafleting outside the factory gates. During one week in the summer of 1894 there was an open air meeting every night around Manchester. Mrs Winbolt spoke at these meetings alongside other campaigners such as Richard and Emmeline Pankhurst. The Special Appeal had gathered 250,000 signatures from around the country.

In 1896 Esther Roper, while holidaying in Italy, met Eva Gore-Booth. Eva was the younger sister of Constance Markievicz, who in 1919 was to be the first woman elected to Parliament in 1919, having escaped the death penalty for her part in the Easter Rising.



Esther Roper

Elected as a Sinn Féin candidate, Constance never took up her post in Westminster.

Esther and Eva fell in love. In 1897 Eva moved to Manchester to live with Esther and begin a life-long collaboration of fighting for social justice, primarily campaigning with working-class women and always coming from left field when choosing their battles.

The new partnership added fresh energy to a new mood for women's suffrage, drawing together a "new generation of working-class women who were emerging through the growing labour movement".

Popular history dates the new mood to be 1903 in the drawing room of 62 Nelson Street, Manchester, or to 1905 after two arrests at a Liberal Party public meeting in Manchester Free Trade Hall. It is more accurate to say the new mood was captured when Esther Roper decided to bring together for the first time trade unions and the campaign for votes for women, and when she sought out Mrs Winbolt and Annie Heaton in 1894.

The work they did showed the world that tens of thousands of women mill workers wanted political rights and representation, and as a means to improve the lot of working-class women, men and their families.

The new mood was further consolidated when Esther and Eva joined forces with Sarah Reddish and Sarah Dickenson in 1900. The two Sarahs were mill workers and seasoned trade union organisers with more than 40 years of experience between them. They were eager to join Esther and Eva in launching a new petition, exclusively aimed at women in the Lancashire cotton mills.

May Day 1900, at an open-air meeting in Blackburn, was the beginning of a feverishly hectic year of meetings all over Lancashire, drawing in women from the Independent Labour Party, Social Democratic Federation (SDF), and the newly formed Labour Representation Committee (LRC), Women's Co-operative Guild, as well as the unions.

The women took the petition into union committees and onto the factory floor. They took motions calling for votes for women to the TUC, ILP, and LRC. The new mood continued to draw in strong resolute women who had learned their negotiating skills, and their ability to persuade and to organise, on the factory floor or in the sweatshop. Selina Cooper, Ethel Derbyshire, Nellie Keaton, Helen Silcock, Ada Neild Chew, Mrs Ramsbottom, Katherine Rowton, Mrs Green and many, many more joined the battle.

According to a report in the *Englishwoman's Review*, "Canvassers in fifty places — one, two, three or four in each, according to the numbers of the factory population — were soon at work". They organised more than 30 major open-air meetings, and countless smaller meetings at ILP branches etc.

They trudged the streets, knocking on doors in the evenings, engaging work-exhausted women usually surrounded by children and trying to cook the evening meal. By spring 1901 they had convinced 30,000 Lancashire mill women to sign the petition for women's suffrage.

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Where we stand

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses and to militantly assert working-class interests.

In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:

- ✂ Independent working-class representation in politics.
- ✂ A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- ✂ A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- ✂ Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- ✂ A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- ✂ Open borders.
- ✂ Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- ✂ Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- ✂ Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- ✂ Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.



If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

Events

Saturday 14 April

Unseat Wandsworth Tory Council
11am, Outside PCS Union building, 160 Falcon Road, London SW11 2LN
bit.ly/2Gfdd1R

Saturday 14 April

Leeds March for the NHS
11.30am, Leeds Art Gallery, The Headrow, Leeds LS1 3AA
bit.ly/2p8mDpf

Wednesday 18 April

Protest Modi's visit to the UK
12 noon, Downing St, London SW1A 2AA
<http://bit.ly/2GMXdEy>

Saturdays 21 & 28 April

What organisation of socialists do we need? Workers' Liberty day schools.
12- 5pm, Sheffield (21 April) and London (28 April)
bit.ly/21-28ap

Saturday 28 April

Sheffield March for the NHS
1.30pm, Barker's Pool, Sheffield S1 2JA
bit.ly/21qM5P6

Saturday 12 May

TUC march: "A new deal for working people"
11am, Victoria Embankment
bit.ly/tuc-12

Have an event you want listing? Email: solidarity@workersliberty.org

More online at www.workersliberty.org



Workers' Liberty



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Momentum on antisemitism

LABOUR

By Will Sefton

That the Labour left movement Momentum has released a statement taking on antisemitism in the Labour Party and the left is welcome.

Until now Momentum had been silent on the issue, and had made no suggestions for political education or training on the issue.

The statement from the group's National Coordinating Group goes some way to addressing these shortfalls but is not as comprehensive as the one agreed by the Momentum Steering Committee in 2016 but never released.

The 2016 statement calls for the implementation of the Chakrabarti report and for a fairer disciplinary process that would avoid Labour members being suspended and then left almost indefinitely without a hearing.

Momentum's latest statement talks about providing education on how capitalism works and moving past conspiratorial thinking. They say they will be seeking partners to help deliver the training, but who those partners will be is not clear.

We think local groups should urgently hold political discussions and develop ideas to send to the Momentum NCG. Any educational process should empower groups and local activists as much as possible.

Both statements are published below.

The full text of the recent statement on antisemitism from Momentum's National Coordinating Group.

Momentum's National Coordinating Group (NCG) acknowledges the anger, upset and despair within the British Jewish community at the numerous cases of antisemitism in the Labour Party and the Party's failure to date to deal with them in a sufficiently decisive, swift and transparent manner.

We also note Jeremy Corbyn's personal pledge to be a militant opponent of antisemitism and a permanent ally of the Jewish Community — and his apology for the pain caused both to Jewish members of the Labour Party and to the wider Jewish community by what he describes as the "socialism of fools", as well as newer forms of antisemitism which "have been woven into criticism of Israeli governments".

Momentum's NCG believes that accusations of antisemitism should not and cannot be dismissed simply as right wing smears nor as the result of conspiracies. Current examples of antisemitism within the Labour Party are not only a problem of a few, extreme "bad apples" but also of unconscious bias which manifests itself in varied, nuanced and subtle ways and is more widespread in the Labour Party

than many of us had understood even a few months ago.

It is possible to accept that antisemitism is a problem in parts of the left and needs to be loudly denounced whilst also accepting that some of Jeremy Corbyn's political opponents are opportunistically using this issue as a way to undermine his leadership. However, the actions of others do not reduce our responsibility to challenge antisemitism whenever and wherever it occurs.

Discussions over recent days have reinforced the need for a programme of political education across the movement — both unconscious bias training specifically targeted at antisemitism and a broader programme of political education which moves people away from conspiratorial thinking and towards a systematic understanding of how society and capitalism works.

Momentum has therefore resolved to explore partnerships with external organisations to deliver awareness trainings open to all Labour members; to renew our focus on a broad programme of political education; and to support any Labour Party initiatives in relation to antisemitism.

Furthermore, Momentum will review its constitution and complaints procedures in order to ensure that they are fit for purpose as a clear statement of Momentum's values and practical commitment to stamping out antisemitism and all forms of discrimination. We will also provide further guidance and support for our local groups to help them in implementing these aspects of our constitution and upholding our values.

The 2016 statement on antisemitism from Momentum's national Steering Committee

Momentum unambiguously condemns antisemitism, as it condemns all forms of racism and discrimination, and welcomes Jeremy Corbyn's launch of an expert-led inquiry. We recognise that each form of racism has its own history, contemporary manifestations, nuances and particularisms, and that these each need to be explored and understood to be overcome.

We hope that the inquiry is the start of a process of investigating how racism and oppression that in society replicate themselves in any way in the Labour Party. For the labour movement to fight these injustices effectively, we need comrades self-criticism, education and awareness-raising of these issues. We pledge that Momentum will play a productive role in this process, and will encourage members to express their experiences of antisemitism, Islamophobia and other



forms of racism as part of the Chakrabarti Inquiry.

Momentum takes the need to the fight all forms of racism discrimination, including on the left and in the labour movement, seriously. We do not believe that questions of racism can be dealt with simply by people saying that they are not racist or prejudiced. A deeply analysis of the specific nuances is needed, which is why Momentum backs the Chakrabarti Inquiry. As with the recent controversies around antisemitism, the matter cannot be dealt with simply by people stating they are not antisemitic or just by drawing a distinction between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. Criticising Zionism is not necessarily antisemitic, of course, but some anti-Zionist politics is. Expressing solidarity for the Palestinians is distinct, and should be without any suggestion of antisemitism.

As a new organisation, we certainly have differences and disagreements, within this broad framework, in our ranks about issues of how Zionism and anti-Zionism are related to antisemitism. We will encourage a discussion throughout the organisation to draw out these differences, educate ourselves and develop our positions further.

In terms of the recent controversy, the left has nothing to learn from the Tory party and Tory press, as evidenced by the slew of bigoted and Islamophobic attacks on Sadiq Khan during the election for London mayor.

We also oppose the use of these issues as a factional weapon within the Labour Party, and to undermine the elected party leadership. We oppose the push to make it easier to expel people; there should be an end to factional expulsions and everyone should have due process.

In any this problem must be addressed *politically*, through discussion and education. This requirements an atmosphere of free speech and debate, where those raising concerns of antisemitism are taken seriously; where criticisms of Israel are not automatically shouted down as antisemitic; and where the discussion is not manipulated for factional purposes.

Momentum will encourage such a serious discussion in our own organisation as well as in the Labour Party and the wider labour movement and encourage members to participate in

USS strike ballot: Vote No!

By a UCU member

University and College Union members are voting on a deal that would see strikes in over sixty universities called off in return for an independent review of pension provision. Voting ends on 16 April.

Fourteen days of strike action in February and March forced university bosses UUK to ditch a plan to end guaranteed pensions. But now strikers are being asked to put their trust in a process that may produce nothing better.

Back in March, employers offered a transitional three-year deal — better than their starting point but still a huge cut — which was forcefully rejected with the slogan ‘No Capitulation!’ The union leadership went back to negotiations and the employers offered a working group instead. This group will look at the details of the contentious pension fund valuation.

The employers say they want to keep some element of “defined benefit” pension. But the rejected March proposal kept that too. It guaranteed pensions on salaries up to £42k (about the third point on the main lecturer scale) instead of the current £55k (roughly the top of the senior lecturer scale). This looks very much like a way to get that through by the back door. The language the bosses are using is very close indeed to the wording of the March offer.

Supporters of the plan say if it doesn’t work we can come back for more action. But it will be much harder to convince people to fight again next year if they see minimal results for their fight now. There is already a backlog of work thanks to the strikes and working-to-con-



tract, and Unison is balloting to join the dispute. Why abandon that to start again from scratch?

UCU has strong arguments to put to the independent pensions review. But winning the argument is not the same as winning a dispute. As it stands the offer means the strikes will be called off with nothing but warm words in return. That is not good enough.

The leadership of UCU have been badly lacking in this latest stage of action. Instead of going back to the employers and saying “this is good but we need more guarantees”, as many branches wanted, they put the offer straight

to members over the Easter break. The timing (as UUK no doubt know) means it’s tricky to organise collective discussion of tactics. Worse, the General Secretary sent the ballot with an email that comes as close as it can to recommending a “yes” vote without actually doing so.

Activists have been using social media to make an alternative case, and organising for a No vote. Let’s not settle for less than we can get.

• For expert briefings on the dispute from activists, see www.uss-briefs.com.

Open University: fight the cuts!

Bosses at the Open University are planning to slash up to a third of courses to save £100m a year from its £420m budget. A voluntary redundancy programme begins this week.

The OU has been badly hit by the slump in part-time student numbers following the 2012 rise in tuition fees. Whereas previously most OU students had been able to pay their way through alongside full-time work, they were

now faced with taking out loans, and many decided against it.

Staff at the Open University have voted No Confidence in the Vice-Chancellor Peter Horrocks after he claimed its distance learning model wasn’t “teaching”. UCU says the proposals will destroy the institution and reduce it to a digital content provider.

The local UCU branch is meeting this week to discuss next steps.

Recycling workers strike for sick pay

By Simon Nelson

Workers at FCC Environment in Hull are striking for 14-days (starting 29 March) for decent sick-pay.

This follows a previous week-long strike in March. FCC is a subsidiary of a Spanish company that describes itself as “a world-wide leader in citizen services, specialised in environment, water and infrastructure”. It reported a 12.7% increase in earnings in the first quarter of 2017, totalling \$188 million globally.

The Unison Hull City branch has been campaigning for a better sick-pay scheme, with the company refusing to include this in the latest pay negotiations.

The strikes have remained solid with GMB organised refuse drivers refusing to cross the picket line.

Teachers call for strike ballot on 5% pay demand

By a delegate

The conference of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) section of the National Education Union (NEU) (Brighton, 30 March to 3 April) called for a 5% pay rise.

It said the union should ballot all members for strikes in the 2018/19 school year if we don’t get that.

The initial motion on pay from the Executive called only for a ballot “if internal polling suggests that there would be sufficient support”. Conference passed an amendment from Coventry which linked in the issue of workload and made the commitment to a ballot clear.

However, the motion only commits the executive to put forward the strategy to the Joint Executive Council of NUT and ATL, in office during the merger to form the NEU. ATL conference is on 9-11 April.

This year the union has failed to hold even a consultative ballot over boycotting SAT tests in primary schools, despite a resolution at last year’s conference.

In Brighton, activists from the Socialist Teachers’ Alliance, now de facto the established pro-leadership faction in the union, again made tub-thumping speeches against primary testing but backed a motion that would only commit the union to carry out “an indicative survey” on action.

That motion ruled out important parts of another which actually committed the union to a boycott of high-stakes, summative primary testing, and Workers’ Liberty and ESN activists convinced around 40% of conference to vote against the softer motion.

Conference took an emergency motion on OFSTED’s statements that it would speak to young girls about why they wore the hijab in

schools. An amendment condemned the proposed “Punish a Muslim day” on Tuesday 3 April and expressed solidarity with Muslims and communities affected.

Workers’ Liberty activists voted for the amendment and abstained on the main motion. We believe that OFSTED inspectors have no business asking young girls why they are wearing the clothes they are wearing. We disagree with the motion’s assertion that primary-aged girls are exercising a free choice when it comes to wearing the hijab. Union president Kiri Tunks did not acknowledge our abstention and called the vote as being unanimously in favour.

The mood of conference was often one of cheering consensus. There was a moment of rank-and-file-led revolt at the end of conference when Sheffield delegates initiated a motion to suspend standing orders, gathering the necessary 200 delegate signatures overnight, over the date of next year’s full NEU conference.

The President had announced, without prior consultation, that next year’s conference would be four days, rather than five, and held during term time for several divisions.

Workers’ Liberty activists also distributed a leaflet criticising the £48,000 the union has spent in the past two years on subsidising trips to Cuba, allowing the regime to claim it has the support of foreign trade unionists. The Cuban regime refuses to allow free and independent trade unions, and abolished the right to strike in 1960.

Janine Booth spoke at a Workers’ Liberty fringe meeting on Minnie Lansbury. The Education Solidarity Network held two fringe meetings, on anti-academy struggles and on testing and workload.

DLR workers to strike again

By Ollie Moore

Workers on London’s Docklands Light Railway (DLR) will strike from 20-24 April, as part of an ongoing dispute over a range of attacks by Keolis Amey Docklands (KAD), the contractor that operates the DLR.

KAD has begun to outsource

more work on the DLR, which the RMT union undermines the job security of existing staff. Recent roster changes have also hit work/life balance, with RMT also accusing KAD of failing to uphold company procedures.

The strikes threaten to disrupt the London Marathon, due to take place over that weekend.

Indefinite library strike over pay

Workers at libraries in Bromley started an indefinite strike on Wednesday 28 March over pay.

Bromley’s libraries have been run by Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL) since a battle to keep them under public control was lost in November 2017. In this year’s pay negotia-

tions GLL has refused to meet the pay offer other local government workers will be getting.

Workers earning £19,000 would have seen a 2.9% pay rise if still directly employed by the council, and some lower earners would have had a 4% pay rise.

Wildcat strike for workplace safety

By Gemma Short

Workers at the Orion recycling plant in east London took part in a wildcat strike on Wednesday 28 March to protest dangerous and inhumane working conditions.

The workers, all migrants from Peru, joined the United Voices of the World (UVW) union just the day before after contacting the union with videos of their working conditions which showed thick

clouds of dust and workers without adequate protection.

After negotiations with bosses at the gate the company agreed to provide proper face masks, air filters, gloves, four pairs of protective overalls each, soap and toilet paper.

They also agreed to provide showers on site within a month and to meet with the union to discuss a 25% pay rise for the lowest paid to bring them onto the London Living Wage, and occupational sick pay.





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Douma atrocity is a sign of Assad's victory

By Simon Nelson

After nearly seven years of unrest and civil war in Syria, Assad's chemical attack on the civilian population trapped in Douma, a city near the capital Damascus, no longer seems shocking; it was the action of a regime that is able to kill and maim with impunity.

The attack on the city followed negotiations which ended on 25 March with an agreement for a cessation of armed attacks, to allow for civilian evacuations. People were allowed stay, including members of the main rebel group there, HTS, on condition they became civilian police. 4,500 people were evacuated before the attack.

But on April 6, 2018 the heavy shelling of Douma which culminated in the two chemical attacks continued. 350 airstrikes were carried out in 48 hours. Syrian helicopters dropped 120 barrel bombs.

Assad did not need to use chemical weapons against the civilian population. The regime was on the cusp of taking control of this area and is in control of all but a handful of areas in the entire country. (Idlib in north-west Syria, is the largest area that is not under his control, and still has rebels who wants Assad replaced.)

The attack was about showing that his regime and his Russian

and Iranian allies are in control and will not tolerate any dissent of any kind.

The small pockets of resistance to Assad are now dominated by the jihadists of Jaish al-Islam (HTS) who are unable to win the war. Meanwhile Turkey, the major backers of the Free Syrian Army, is focused on repressing the Kurds. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states know it is increasingly futile for them to back the various jihadist factions scattered across Syria.

RUSSIA

Russia claims the attack simply didn't happen, while the US, France and the EU condemned it.

As we go to press Donald Trump is threatening airstrikes against Assad and his allies in response. A targeted airstrike on 8 April, was probably carried out by Israel following missiles being launched from Lebanon. This was a warning to Iran not to set up military bases near Syria's border with Israel.

Some on the left have questioned why Assad would launch such an attack when he is so close to victory. Those influenced by Stalinism and a desire to see Russia as a bulwark against US imperialism have even said that it could not have happened.

An inability to recognise and



condemn the brutal nature of the Assad regime was reflected in the Labour Party's woeful statement. That calls on "all those" who have used chemical weapons to be punished and describing the rebels in Douma as "occupying". Those rebels are not friends of the left, women, the labour movement or minorities, but they are no more occupying than the regime is. Except of course, these rebels are not backed up by Russian jets and Iranian and Lebanese militias. The

statement's talk of meaningful dialogue to find a lasting political settlement is a fantasy. Assad has won the war and is celebrating his victory with a gruesome show of power.

The Labour leaders' inability to squarely face reality mirrored Corbyn's initial response to the poisoning of ex-KGB agent Sergei Skripal, when he refused to blame Russia for the poisoning and stressed that a third party could have carried out the attack.

Assad is now very likely to make more such attacks to enforce his grip on any area that has been a rebel stronghold. For seven years Syria has been the battleground for clashes of regional imperialist rivalries, with Russian and the US supporting their own chosen sides as and when they chose to.

The displacement of refugees both within Syria and outside its borders has caused a huge humanitarian crisis. This will, in the immediate future, get worse as Assad restores "order".

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